

# Magabala Books • Teacher Notes

## Lemons in the Chicken Wire

Alison Whittaker

Teacher Notes prepared by Christina Wheeler

### OVERVIEW

From a remarkable new voice in Indigenous writing comes this highly original collection of poems bristling with stunning imagery and gritty textures. At times sensual, always potent, *Lemons in the Chicken Wire* delivers a collage of work that reflects rural identity through a rich medley of techniques and forms.

It is an audacious, lyrical and linguistically lemon flavoured poetry debut that possesses a rare edginess and seeks to challenge our imagination beyond the ordinary. Alison Whittaker demonstrates that borders, whether physical or imagined, are no match for our capacity for love.

- Original and powerful new Indigenous voice
- Strong secondary educational title: contemporary themes would suit tertiary curriculum
- Front cover endorsement from award-winning Indigenous poet, Ali Cobby-Eckermann
- Outstanding author reviews from literary magazines and festivals

### THEMES

- Indigenous histories and culture
- Colonisation and dispossession
- Importance of Country
- Love and relationships
- Coming-of-age
- Identity

### AUDIENCE AND WRITING STYLE

*Lemons in the Chicken Wire* is suitable for an older audience, including Yr 10 and senior secondary students. Its free verse format comments on a variety of issues including the colonisation of Australia and subsequent dispossession of Indigenous peoples, as well as many aspects of Aboriginal culture such as the importance of Country, kin, rituals and customs. It is a text about identity that is raw, honest and wry. The writing style is gritty, sincere and sophisticated. It allows for deep interpretation and analysis, and will allow readers to make connections to Indigenous issues as well as those associated with the coming-of-age. It contains some explicit language.

### LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

This book and the classroom activities provided are primarily relevant to the following areas of the Australian Curriculum, as well as various Senior Secondary English Syllabuses in most Australian States and Territories:

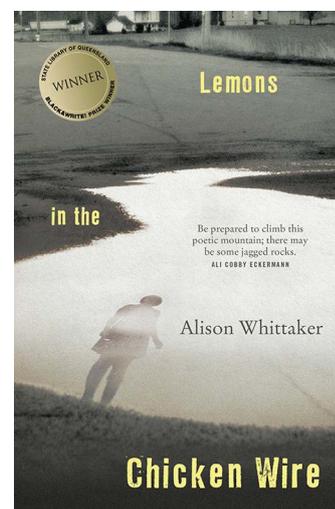
Learning area	Year level
Australian Curriculum: English	Year 10
Senior Secondary English	Years 11-12

The appendix highlights relevant content descriptions, cross-curriculum priorities and general capabilities that relate to the text and classroom ideas provided.

### CULTURAL NOTES

- The Gomeri people of Tamworth/Gunnedah region
- Importance of land and connection to Country
- Funerary customs/beliefs about death

For information about teaching Australian Indigenous content see [Teaching Indigenous content with Magabala Books](#).



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Alison Whittaker** is a Gomeri poet, life writer and essayist from Gunnedah and Tamworth, north-western New South Wales. She now lives in Sydney on Wangal land, where she studies a combined Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Laws at the University of Technology Sydney. Her work has been published in *Archer Magazine*, *Meanjin*, *Vertigo* and *Colouring the Rainbow: Blak Queer and Trans Perspectives*.

In 2015, Alison was awarded one of two Indigenous Writing Fellowships by the State Library of Queensland's black&write! project. Written over four years and inspired by small fragments of her own life, *Lemons in the Chicken Wire* is Alison's first published collection.

## CLASSROOM IDEAS

### English

- The dedication reads 'To the land, and those who grow from it.' As you read the poems in *Lemons in the Chicken Wire*, reflect on the cultural connection between Aboriginal people and the land. How is this shown throughout Alison Whittaker's text?
- Discuss the way in which 'Land-ed' (p7) uses imagery to set the tone for the rest of the text. What is the author's relationship with both urban and rural landscapes? Use examples from the text to support your ideas.
- Likewise, once finished reading *Lemons in the Chicken Wire*, consider the relevance of the final poem, 'Chicken Wire Lemons' (p59) to conclude the text.
- 'Willi Willi Will I' (p9) depicts an urbanised school girl contemplating her people's history and culture. Why does she have to 'Google to understand' her own culture? What comment is the poet making by including 'acrylic lines' in traditional Aboriginal artwork? Discuss the 'diaspora of [her] people' in order to contextualise the contrast of an enforced westernisation of an ancient people.
- Track the relationships that the poet shares with various members of her family. How would you describe these relationships?
- Alison Whittaker's voice is both edgy and authentic. Share examples from her writing that show these qualities.
- There are three poems in *Lemons in the Chicken Wire* set at funerals. What do these poems tell us about the poet's outlook on life and death? How does her humour and wryness help shape these poems?
- Select poems from *Lemons in the Chicken Wire* that share the narrator's coming-of-age and growing sense of identity. How have these sentiments been expressed?
- In poems such as 'Carry the One' (p14), 'The Double Mirror' (p39) and 'The Body Country' (p44), the colonisation of Australia and the dispossession of Aboriginal people is addressed. What is the mood and perspective of these poems? How have these been achieved?
- What message is being conveyed in 'Flora' (p22) and 'Fauna' (p23)?
- How do poems such as 'Scrag Lit' (p29) reveal a vulnerable and fragile person unsure of her potential to share and experience love?
- Using examples from the text, discuss how the poet uses verse to process her experiences of growing up and navigating relationships and love?
- Discuss the author's comment on the European invasion of Australia? What are the implications for her people and culture? How does she share these ideas through her choice of language features?
- Find examples from the text that show the relationship between the narrator and her Nan. How is this relationship unique? How does it differ from the relationship she has with her mother? How does it compare with the relationship you share with your grandmother?
- Which poems indicate the connection the author shares with rural Australia? How is this connection revealed through language choices?
- Discuss the way in which certain poems share experiences of intimacy and love. What questions or wanderings to you have about these poems?
- Alison Whittaker's poetry has been described as 'astounding, proudly experimental, innovative, daring, disjunctive, playful and unique'. Select three or four of her poems that you think reflect this view of her work. Annotate these poems to show your understanding of these attributes.
- The author is a Gomeri poet and uses this language in poems such as 'Heavy Tongue' (p38) and 'Sharp Tongue' (p42). What is her message in these poems?



- Research Truganinni's story. How has the poet integrated Truganinni's narrative into the poem 'Atriplex Cinerea' (p43)?
- Create a visual representation of the way in which the poet expresses her Aboriginality. Include both her passion and her feelings of disconnectedness. Use lines from the poems to help communicate your ideas.
- Discuss the author's use of figurative language throughout the text. How does it contribute to the reading experience?
- Who is your favourite character in the text? Why?
- In what ways does *Lemons in the Chicken Wire* show human capacity to love?
- How has the poet used poetry and language to empower herself? Select a theme present in *Lemons in the Chicken Wire* such as identity or love on which to write your own free verse poetry in which your voice can be heard.
- Which is your favourite poem in *Lemons in the Chicken Wire*? Why does it appeal to you?
- What are your opinions of the content, style and messages in *Lemons in the Chicken Wire*? Which poems can you relate to? How do your values and life experiences influence your evaluation of the text?
- Many of the ideas, concepts and experiences in *Lemons in the Chicken Wire* are shared in abstract ways. What language features has the poet used to develop such a rich and complex text?
- Why is the text entitled 'Lemons in the Chicken Wire'? What is the symbolism behind this title?
- Research the Gomeri people to further appreciate her connection to Country as evidenced through her poetry.

## APPENDIX - LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

Year	English
10	<p><b>Language</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand how language use can have inclusive and exclusive social effects, and can empower or disempower people (<a href="#">ACELA1564</a>)</li> <li>• Understand that people's evaluations of texts are influenced by their value systems, the <a href="#">context</a> and the purpose and <a href="#">mode</a> of communication (<a href="#">ACELA1565</a>)</li> <li>• Analyse how higher order concepts are developed in complex texts through <a href="#">language features</a> including <a href="#">nominalisation</a>, <a href="#">clause</a> combinations, technicality and abstraction (<a href="#">ACELA1570</a>)</li> </ul> <p><b>Literature</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compare and evaluate a range of representations of individuals and groups in different historical, social and cultural contexts (<a href="#">ACELT1639</a>)</li> <li>• Reflect on, extend, endorse or refute others' interpretations of and responses to literature (<a href="#">ACELT1640</a>)</li> <li>• Evaluate the social, moral and ethical positions represented in texts (<a href="#">ACELT1812</a>)</li> <li>• Identify, explain and discuss how <a href="#">narrative</a> viewpoint, structure, characterisation and devices including <a href="#">analogy</a> and <a href="#">satire</a> shape different interpretations and responses to a <a href="#">text</a> (<a href="#">ACELT1642</a>)</li> <li>• Compare and evaluate how '<a href="#">voice</a>' as a literary device can be used in a range of different <a href="#">types of texts</a> such as poetry to evoke particular emotional responses (<a href="#">ACELT1643</a>)</li> <li>• <a href="#">Create</a> literary texts with a sustained '<a href="#">voice</a>', selecting and adapting appropriate <a href="#">text</a> structures, literary devices, language, auditory and visual structures and features for a specific purpose and intended <a href="#">audience</a> (<a href="#">ACELT1815</a>)</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Cross curriculum priorities</b></p> <p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures</p>
	<p><b>General Capabilities</b></p> <p>Literacy, Intercultural understanding</p>

